8: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1951) 1971 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

Lazy Boy, the oldest living Piegan a decade ago, followed this traditional custom in naming my younger daughter. He gave her the name Many-Steals-Horses-Woman, explaining that as a young man he had been very successful in capturing horses from enemy camps so he thought this name would bring her good fortune in whatever she tried to do.

Elaborate cradles were luxury items, uncommon among the Blackfeet a century ago. When walking or riding on horseback, women commonly carried their babies on their backs, inside their robes or blankets. The mother stood with her back bent, grasped the infant by both arms, swung it over her shoulders, then quickly drew her robe about her own body and that of the child. Blackfoot mothers nursed their babies until long after they were able to walk. Indeed, some mothers continued to nurse their children until they were five or six years old, believing this would prevent another pregnancy until their youngest child was old enough to look after himself.

Children were taught the elements of good manners and respect for their elders. They were expected to sit quietly while adults were talking in the tipi, to perform their chores promptly, to observe the taboos of the family medicine bundles, and to help the aged and show particular respect to them. They were taught to take teasing gracefully. But if a child of about their own age struck them, they were to fight back to the best of their ability.

The mother was responsible for the education of her daughters. The little girl began to learn about women's responsibilities by watching her mother and grandmothers at their tasks. She imitated their actions in her childhood play. She began to help her mother in such light tasks as picking berries, and graduated to the heavier work of digging roots and carrying firewood and water for the lodge. As the girl grew older, she received instructions in dressing hides, preparing foods, making clothing, and in the women's crafts of geometric painting, porcupine quillwork, and beadwork. A girl was expected to become proficient in these crafts before she married. At the annual sun dance mothers ex-

12: Hanks & Richardson E,P-5 (1938, 1939) 1966
NF6 Blackfoot NF6
Northern Blackfoot

607 to learn to cook, tan hides, and make moccasins. There was no hazing of the
585 new wife; rather, if very young, she was treated like a child in the attempt to make her feel at home in this new situation.

593 In addition social dicta prescribed that women be participators in the
562 cultural rewards apart from the warpath. This was mainly the case with
[778] ceremonial life. It was always necessary for a man to have a woman partner when he obtained the medicine pipe or entered the sacred societies. In these
[575] activities it was usually a wife, though a man might seek another woman to
796 take her place. These women were not ceremonially so important as a male.
593 However, one case shows where a man refused to join the Crazy Dog society,
562 and to overcome his resistance, his comrades took his wife as a member. As
[575] under this circumstance he could not refuse his wife and maintain community respect, he paid for her membership and sat beside her in all the meetings. In the Sun Dance alone a woman overshadowed her husband, but
[571] this status assured her husband of a firm marital tie. As Sun Dance vower, she personified the cultural ideal of womanhood, the woman who above all was faithful to her husband.

562 Beyond this elevation of the status of women through the necessity for
842 women partners in receiving sacred objects and in participating in general social life, there lay a mystical concept. Through women came the greatest treasures the culture offered. This meant in the family that a man might
[603] have children, for children of both sexes were avidly desired. Older people
[597] raised their grandchildren in order to have children in the tipi. It was also the practice to adopt a child should one's own child die. This pattern of cul-
562 tural rewards went even farther. In obtaining the most sacred root in the
796 Horn and ma'toki societies, the root which was the zenith of sacred objects
778 brought to the earth by the woman who brought the Sun Dance, a woman
[575] was necessary. In an esoteric ceremonial set a woman obtained for her husband the root from a man who sold it. This was a very secret and unmention-
[432] able event that separated socially the seller from the buyer until the two
[571] "made friends" at some time when neither owned the root any longer. Thus through marriage the two worlds of the male and the female were united to
581 obtain the rewards of the culture.
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Balancing of the Lines

601 The question of lineality arises in any discussion of kinship terminology
602 in its relation to the family organization. We believe that there is only slight, if any, emphasis on the paternal line.

601 Critical in fixing lineality is the relative weight of husband versus wife's
607 brother. In the foregoing paragraphs a relative balance of the two authorities has been indicated. Ideally, it was a friendly, warm, though respectful relationship, implying a type of cooperation like that between brothers,

776 783 824 paraphernalia. It was chewed in ceremonies involving prolonged fasting as a means of extended endurance. Sweet grass was used generally by everyone as incense with daily prayers.

846 824 783 An occasion for the use of sweet grass---one that was somewhat outside the bundle system but nevertheless of great importance---was the return of a woman with her newborn child. Traditionally, a woman would remain apart from her husband for about thirty-four days after giving birth. Just [851] before returning home she would be assisted by a woman so old she could have no more children. A complete set of new clothes was laid out for the mother. While this was being done the mother bathed in water scented with sweet grass. A smudge was prepared, and when the mother had finished bathing she covered herself with a robe and stood over the incense from the smudge. Then her new clothes were held to the smudge four times before she was [302] allowed to put them on. Her face, arms, and feet were ochred red. She was now considered to be completely cleansed (from the bad blood of the birth). The old woman who assisted her took her prepartum clothing and threw it in the river, where it floated away or sank out of sight. (Women who could not afford a new set of clothes kept their old ones and were purified in [842] them.) The mother then returned home as if she were newly married. (It was at this time that a woman would begin the practice of birth control; for this purpose a mixture of plants having abortifacient or contraceptive properties was contained in a religious bundle of special design.)

824 Braids of sweet grass were tied vertically around the base of the Horn Society staffs. Braids were also strung on the inside of headbands of the Motokiks headdresses.

[825] One inf ~~want~~ told us that the Owl and the Loon in the medicine pipes owned the sweet grass and that the bear owned the juniper; but we have not

824 We have been
575 told that the power root was once included in the rites of
[561] most of the age-graded societies and of the Matoas Beaver and Medicine Pipe bundles. Most of these rites are now extinct; only the rites of the Horns and the Motokiks persist, and they are incomplete.

796 In the Horn Society the root figured mainly in the initiation ceremonies:
824 it could be found in the nontransferable initiation bundles. Having been
575 distributed by the owner of the Spear Staff bundle to the others, down to
778 the owner of the Spear Staff bundle to the others down to the owner of the Marten, the root was kept in the mouth and used to bless the initiates. After the ritual the root was tied to the paint-application sticks (Fig. 23 &24), to fortify and replenish the supernatural power inherent in the paint. The same was done with a wooden scratching-pin, which was either worn in the hair or attached to one's garments. This was done in preparation for the next opening ceremony.

● [842] Sau-gas-sin was used during the secret ceremony of the Horns, in which the chief ceremonialist participated in a fertility rite with the initiates's wife. Pieces of the root were attached to the binding of the Spear Staff (with bundle), which was the head staff of the society.

[754] Apparently, curses were indulged in by the Horn Society as a whole. In
[343] this case a special sweat lodge was constructed. A human figure representing the condemned man was drawn in the bottom of a pit intended to contain hot stones. The stones were brought in at a designated time and placed on the drawing to represent the victim's suffering. The power root was kept in the mouth during this ceremony.

[307] The Pigeon Society used the same root during the ritual of body-painting
[212] and in the same manner as did the Horn Society. The root was tied to the headdresses of all members of this society.

000 Society members were very careful to avoid being provoked while the root

Part II

PLANTS USED IN BIRTH CONTROL

Overview

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The Blackfoot owned ceremonial bundles which were used to produce and prevent fertility. Our records indicate that botanical ingredients were used only to prevent conception and for the performance of abortion.

[p.56]

BIRTH CONTROL

824 842 778 [847] [771] In the matter of birth control, the Blackfoot practiced it in two ways. Conception was thought to be avoided through the use of a special ceremonial bundle and abortions were performed with the aid of an herbal brew. The former required the services of a diviner who professed the power to prevent conception while the latter was an event that could be accomplished by the mother alone.

[126] [711] Several of these anti-conception bundles, constructed between 1880-1930, have been collected and the authors reported of at least fourteen more on the reservations of the Blackfoot, still being used by elderly diviners, all women.

[301] [237] [386] [532] There is a consistant pattern of bundle contents (see Figs. 27 &28); otter-skin wristlets each with an incised bone bead, the design representing a snake; yellow ochre in a skinbag; and a quantity of pulverized plant material in another skinbag. An exception to this pattern is the bundle [291] [301] collected by Ewers which contained a beaded, snake-shaped belt and lacked wristlets.

824 778 771 842 A woman seeking conception control would approach a diviner for instruction in the use of the bundle. The diviner would, for a fee, use her bundle on the patient or make one for her. Without going into the details [302] of the ceremony, we should note that the major part of the ritual involves the ochreing of the body from the head down to the navel and from the feet [301] to the knees, thereby isolating the reproductive area. The wristlets were [784] worn for a prescribed period during which time the patient was enjoined to [825] observe certain taboos. The ceremony was usually performed in the spring when the snakes emerged from hibernation.

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Fig. 27 — Blackfoot birth control bundle. Photo courtesy of J.C. Hellsem.

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Fig. 28 — Wristlets from a Blackfoot birth control bundle.
Photo courtesy of J.C. Hellson.

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Samples of the pulverized plant material from two separate bundles have been identified as the flowers and leaves of new birch suckers (Betula occidentalis). Informants bear out this fact and explain that a decoction of this material is taken as a drink in the event that the power of the bundle to stop conception fails.

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Informants have identified at least three other plants which were used to cause abortion: Anemone multifida, "crooked stem", and Draba incerta. As far as we know, though, they are not associated with any bundles.

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On the topic of childbirth, the plants listed below were used to induce and/or speed delivery.

ACHILLEA MILLEFOLIUM

An old woman would brew the leaves for a woman that was going to have a baby. When she drank it, she started having pains and as the pains got worse, she would drink more. Then she would deliver.

The brew is also drunk to expel the afterbirth. The pattern is to drink it and rub it on the affected part.

ANEMONE PATENS

The plant is boiled and drunk by women to speed delivery.

CAMASSIA QUAMASH

The women will drink the decoction of the root to induce labor.

HIEROCHLOE ODORATA

A tea of sweet grass is taken to stop vaginal bleeding after birth and to help expel the afterbirth.

ARTEMISIA CAMPESTRIS

[847]

Women will drink the decoction of the leaves to abort difficult pregnancies.

different nursing mothers so he could get some milk. She would feed him broths at other times and let him suckle on her own, dry breasts when he got too fussy.

My grandfather suckled on his grandmother's breasts so long that milk started coming out of them. This is true, because a number of relatives have told me that all the elders used to talk about it. She was very proud of herself, and showed off her nursing abilities whenever she could.

Generally children were fed nothing but mother's milk for the first three or four months. Their first food was usually a little broth, and they were given bones to suck on. I've heard of kids that were nursed till they were past six years of age. It wasn't unusual for a playing child to run indoors suddenly and ask to nurse from its mother. Some mothers liked to nurse their kids long as a form of birth control. But I hear this didn't always work.

Babies were kept bundled up most of the time. They were dressed on the upper part of the body while the lower part was packed with soft, dry moss. Then they were wrapped with soft cloth or hide and put inside their moss bag or cradleboard. A moss bag laces all the way up the front so that only the baby's head is exposed. A cradleboard is attached to the back of a moss bag to give it a solid frame, for transporting and to keep the baby better protected. I have used both of these with my kids.

I really like to watch babies when I unlace their moss bags and watch their little arms and legs stretch. They get so used to being in their bags that they often wouldn't sleep unless I laced them up first. This way they are so well padded that I feel very secure in handling them. I have always been told that babies are not strong enough to be held all the time unless they are well wrapped, like this.

Cradleboards were almost essential back in the days when my grandmothers did all their traveling by horseback. The strap on the back of the cradleboard was hooked over the high horn on the traditional-style woman's saddle.

to get mad at her because she would sneak bread into their bed and leave crumbs all over the inside of it at night.

Today a young girl would laugh if her parents told her whom she had to marry. She would probably fight her brothers if they told her how to dress and behave. The law would be after those brothers real fast if they cut off her nose as punishment for bringing the family disgrace by being loose in public. And I wonder how many young men would be able to come up with enough horses and other goods to satisfy the parents of a potential good bride. Yet these are the customs that my grandmothers knew and lived by until just a few years ago.

ON PREVENTING CHILDBIRTH

One thing that many young women like to find out about my grandmothers' ways is how they kept from having children; what were their natural birth control methods. Tribal history and family records show us that childbirth was not much controlled in the old days. Some people were unable to have children, including several very famous men of the past. But among all the rest of the people it was common to see eight, ten, or twelve children in every household. As you know, nature regulates childbirth by age, health, food supply, and so on. Our people were usually content with that. Keep in mind that the old life was hard and dangerous, and infant mortality often ran high. Also there was lots of land and generally lots of food for all that could manage to live.

I have heard about some plants and herbs that were used to prevent childbirth. Often they caused a pregnancy to be terminated, rather than keeping one from happening. The men and women who administered these things were powerful people who had a lot of knowledge to go with their herbal medicines. I don't know anybody like this that is still living.

20: Hungry Wolf I-4,5 (no date) 1980
NF6 Blackfoot NF6
Blood

I myself have never been treated by such a person for such a matter. So I won't be able to say any more about it. 847

There was another way of preventing childbirth that I will mention just for your interest. My grandmothers have told me that the kind of spiritual powers needed to make this way work are no longer existing today. The last of the people who were involved in these traditions are about gone. 842 178

This other way did not usually involve herbs, just strong faith in the powers of certain spirits. The ones who had these powers would make up symbols of snakes or butterflies, which were considered powerful in childbirth. These were given to women who wanted no children. They had to wear them all the time, next to their bodies. For instance, snakes were made from buckskin, stuffed, and worn like a belt. The stuffings were of special materials, and the snake bodies were specially covered with beadwork and sacred paints. Often the women were instructed to stand over a smudge of special incense, so that the smoke could rise up their bodies. They had to do this every night for as long as they wanted no more children. 842 789 [825]

I heard of one man who lived long ago with famous powers dealing with childbirth. He would make a stick-figure drawing of a man on a certain woman's blanket, and she would have no more children. If she changed her mind and wanted children, he would just sit on her blanket for a while, to change the magic.

WOMEN'S SAGE
(Artemisia Frigida)

One plant in the world of Blackfoot botany was left practically for the exclusive use of the women. For that reason it was called women's sage. A companion plant was called man's sage, because it was used mainly by men. Both kinds 824

arouse it, and rode back home as fast as he could. When Cree Man arrived at the camp, Calf Shirt asked for the snake. Cree Man began to shake and cry. He was afraid to touch the snake again lest it bite his stomach. Calf Shirt told him to spit some more of the plant on his hands and on the snake's head, after which Cree Man was able to pick up the snake. Calf Shirt put it into a white sugar bag. 586 593 825 789

Cree Man returned to his home with his wife, but he was unable to sleep for several nights. He continued to have nightmares about rattlesnakes. Calf Shirt sent some sacred paint to him and told him to keep using rattlesnakes for his Power, now that he knew how to handle them. Cree Man just wanted to forget the whole experience.

Calf Shirt used his Rattlesnake Power to doctor various ailments. One of his specialties was sterilizing women. Among his doctoring articles was a buckskin snake that was painted black and had a green glass bead attached to the head and a small bell to the tail. He would lay this snake next to a woman's body, sing his song and give her some kind of Medicine, and the woman would never have children again. 756 842 [237] [531]

Oddly enough, however, he did not have the Power to doctor rattlesnake bites. One time he was careless with the one that he carried with him and it bit him. His relative, old Weasel Head, paid a good horse to a deaf old woman who was able to doctor Calf Shirt until he was well. 756 752 [759]

The Old Man said that Calf Shirt was famous everywhere, but that few people came very near him, because they feared his snakes. He always kept one in a cloth or buckskin bag inside his shirt, by his stomach. The Old Man said, "If he came and sat down at a dance or gathering, everyone around him would get up in a hurry and sit somewhere else. We always wondered what he fed his snakes." 756 231 [554]

Calf Shirt's Powers taught him to design a sacred tipi. It was painted blue and had rattle- 756 778 532

28: Goldfrank E-4,5 (1939) 1967 NF6 Blackfoot NF6
Blood

cepting for the sons of the rich—and they were a decided minority—skill in hunting and warfare and courage in the face of danger were the musts for survival. In a word, self-reliance was the aim and basis of training.

And self-reliance was as necessary inside the home as outside it. Not that the Blood lacked affection for their offsprings, or a desire to support them. Many observers have commented most positively on both these traits. But the dependence on the hunt and war for food and gain, the frequent movings from place to place, made the rearing of children a difficult matter. Many stories are told of newborn infants "thrown away," left to die in the bushes, either because they could not be cared for on the march, or because raiders might hear their cries and thus be led to the camping ground, or because a mother had died in childbirth (the lot of the orphan, and even the half-orphan, was, and still is, far from enviable).

It was also considered desirable to limit the number of children. Two years was the standard interval, but the longer the time between siblings, the more parents demonstrated their love for the child previously born. Moreover, abortion carried no stigma. Magic help for this purpose could be easily secured from an authorized female practitioner, and as a special favor, a stop could be put to childbearing altogether. Revealingly, barrenness is never given as a cause for divorce in this competitive society where women are highly prized as property and sex objects, and where marriage is notoriously unstable.

The hunt and war often and for extended periods took the Blood father away from home. And these absences, however necessary, were a continual threat to a child's security. For whether justified or not, and frequently he was justified, a husband was quick to suspect that "the worst" had happened while he was gone.[21] A child often heard his mother accused of adultery, often saw her beaten, and not infrequently deserted. Whatever the ultimate solution of familial disagreement, the child invariably was the sufferer. Even if his parents remained together, he often sought refuge with a nearby relative to avoid further scenes of violence. If they separated and he went with his mother, as he usually did if he was still "young," his sense of belonging might be rudely disturbed again. For often when his mother remarried, she left him with

[21] Among the Blood jealousy was and is obsessional. Many a husband approaching his end threatened to kill his wife, for only if she accompanied him on his final journey would he be sure that he alone would possess her in the next world. The only Blood confined to an insane asylum, whose case was not complicated by physical causes, attempted to murder his wife because he believed she was having intercourse with a ghost.

child in their home will come forward and adopt it. 855 597

Second, there are the adoptions in which the grandparents take the eldest child and assume full responsibility for it. It is this group that is with most difficulty distinguished from raisings.

Third, there are occasions when a child or adult is adopted in order to replace a deceased relative. This may often be, especially among adults, on the basis of actual physical resemblance. Closely allied to this type is that in which the special "friend" of the deceased is taken for adoption. In these circumstances the adopted person maintains a close relationship with the foster parents, but does not relinquish his place in his own family. 597

Lastly, there is a less tangible reason for adoption, but one frequently expressed, which involves some sympathetic relation of cause and effect. If a woman has been losing all her children she may go to another woman who has been more successful and beg her to take her own baby so that it may have a chance of survival. Conversely, a woman who has had no children will adopt a child and after that she is supposed to start having some of her own. Actually this is not borne out by the facts, but this does not appear to alter the conviction that it is so. One instance is recognized where bad luck in raising children was not forestalled by an adoption. But this is explained on the grounds that it was a white child from off the reservation that was taken. [854] [761] [842]

When there is a child in an unfortunate situation someone with one of these reasons in mind is certain to come forward to assume the responsibility of looking after it. Along with sympathy for the child is a real desire to have it. Circumstances are extremely important in governing an adoption, but the children are taken because they are wanted and not just because these circumstances thrust them upon the foster parents. The two things, the desire for the child and the need of the child for a home, work side by side.

Before going on to the general aspects of adoption I should make further mention of the occasions when the expressed desire is to replace a deceased relative. This may concern either a child or an adult. A man or a woman will see in some younger person a physical resemblance to a child who has died. If it is a child that has caught their attention it will not likely leave its own parents. There will be visiting back and forth and 000